

Political challenges facing labour in SADC

The political upheavals in Zimbabwe coupled with the upcoming presidential election raises some critical questions for the future of labour in the Southern African region.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) formed part of the progressive forces led by the now ruling party - ZANU-PF to overthrow the previous white minority government. It is now caught between its old allegiance to the 'historically progressive' Zanu-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Some observers believe the political agenda of the MDC remains unclear except for its desire to oust President Robert Mugabe. This, Cosatu has argued, is one of the reasons it has been unable to give unequivocal support for the MDC.

The head of Cosatu's international section, Simon Bosbiela talks to Reneé Grawitzky about labour solidarity in the region, the role of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (Satucc) and Cosatu's position on Zimbabwe (see p 10). Michael Koen of the Workers' College in Durban interviewed Jabu Ngcobo about the region (see p 12).

The developments in Zimbabwe have created uncertainty for both Cosatu and the ANC. On the one hand Cosatu is concerned about the potential for abuse

of power by a leader, as is evident in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, the ANC might be concerned that sections of the Zimbabwean labour movement spearheaded the formation of an alternative political party to their traditional allies - Zanu-PF.

This issue and the need to retain independence from the ruling party are a constant source of debate within labour movements in the region. Ebrahim Harvey writes about whether a mass worker party is possible in the South African context (see p 15) while Armstrong Dlamini looks at developments within the unions in Botswana (see p 20). The Namibian-based Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) examines some of the key challenges facing the labour movement post-independence (see p 22). At its recent congress, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) debated whether to disaffiliate from Swapo, but decided to retain the status quo. The NUNW did however, find itself in a rather interesting position in relation to its president. The NUNW's president Risto Kapenda has come out in support of Mugabe. His support of Mugabe is rather confusing. Perhaps Mugabe is keeping a cabinet post open for Kapenda!

To conclude, Mondli Hlatswayo looks at the role played by the South African government in the region (see p 36).